

Entertainment

The 2025 Met Gala makes a serious fashion statement with a theme exploring Black style

Fashion's biggest night celebrates Black dandyism and gives menswear a rare spotlight

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Oscar-nominated actor Colman Domingo, told E! at his Met Gala debut last year that, 'Everything I do, I feel like it's gotta be for the culture. It's gotta be more than just for me.' Domingo is one of several co-chairs at Monday's Met Gala, which features the theme Superfine: Tailoring Black Style and the dress code Tailored for you. (Kevin Mazur/MG24/Getty Images for The Met Museum/Vogue)

While celebrities get set for fashion's biggest night, it seems there could be some serious fashion statements on the horizon at this year's Met Gala.

You can expect to see political messaging filtered through a fashion lens this year, as the theme for Monday's celebrity studded fundraising gala seems to be particularly on point, especially since diversity, equity and inclusion have come [under threat](#) by the Trump administration in the U.S.

The annual event at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York marks the opening of the Met Costume Institute's spring exhibition Superfine: Tailoring Black Style, an examination of Black fashion culture and history. The exhibition is guest-curated by Monica L. Miller and inspired by her 2009 book *Slaves to Fashion: Black Dandyism and the Styling of Black Diasporic Identity*.

The evening's dress code, Tailored For You, is left up to the attendees to interpret. The co-chairs of this year's event are Oscar-nominated actor Colman Domingo, British Formula One driver Lewis Hamilton, rapper A\$AP Rocky, singer and producer Pharrell Williams and Vogue editor-in-chief Anna Wintour — who's co-chaired almost every Met Gala for the past 30 years. Basketball star LeBron James serves as honorary chair.

As the gala's celebrity guests are busy with suit fittings and finalizing details of their ensembles, let's explore what Black dandyism is all about.

More than putting on a tailored suit

Miller traces Black dandyism back to the 18th century, when Black men under the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism were often dressed fashionably by slave owners flaunting their wealth and position. Throughout history, the African diaspora adopted European fashion, melding it with individualism and extravagance to express their identities and subvert racial and gender stereotypes. Fashion became a tool to reclaim dignity under the racial hierarchy.

Charmaine Gooden, the founder of Black Fashion Canada, a database that documents and celebrates Black Canadian designers and fashion pioneers, points out that Black dandyism can have many different definitions in modern times. But at its core, it shouldn't feel forced or uncomfortable.

"[Black people] were required to dress by colonial systems, and then how they were able to interpret those codes within their own dress to move themselves through the system," she said.



Pioneering civil rights activist W.E.B. Du Bois photographed in 1918, left, and musician and rapper André 3000 in 2004, demonstrate the way that Black dandyism is ever evolving. André 3000 is one of 25 committee members at the 2025 Met Gala. (CM Battey/Stephen Shugerman/Getty Images)

From the refined, dashing figures cut by pioneering civil rights activist W.E.B. Du Bois and jazz pianist Duke Ellington in the first half of the 20th century, to today's red carpet sartorial statements from fashionable stars like rapper André 3000 and actor and singer Billy Porter, Black dandyism is ever evolving.

Its lasting impact in fashion takes centre stage as the Met spotlights both Black fashion history and menswear. It's only the second exhibition to focus on menswear since 2003's *Bravehearts: Men in Skirts*.

However, Black dandyism has never been simply about menswear and tailoring, says Henry Navarro Delgado, an associate professor of fashion at the Toronto Metropolitan University.

"I see it more as an attitude," he said. "Like standing out from a crowd."



Actor and singer Billy Porter, who is known for making a splash on red carpets, is seen attending, from left, the 2020 Grammys, the 2019 Met Gala and the 2019 Academy Awards. (Getty Images)

For Black people to put themselves out there within colonial societies where real danger exists, Navarro Delgado suggests they did so for reasons larger than themselves.

"To be an individual, you have to have a community behind you," he said.

"And that is what Black dandyism is about."

Fashion is for all

Navarro Delgado says from the standpoint of historians and cultural commentators, female dandies have not been afforded the same attention and visibility as their male counterparts, but they have been there all along.

He says that by denying Black voices as creators and fashion icons historically, it makes it a lot easier to extract the value of their contributions.

Grace Jones and Janet Jackson, among other women, have been impactful to modern pop culture, embodying dandyism through fitted suits, strong shoulder pads and accessories like statement ties, paving the way for contemporary dandies.



Janelle Monáe, one of the gala's committee members this year, uses sharp tailoring and stylized masculine silhouettes to display her take on Black dandyism and continues to innovate Black style. (The Associated Press)

Black queer icons like Porter and actor and singer Janelle Monáe have taken things a step further.

They frequently push traditional fashion boundaries with red carpet looks that defy gender and social constructs and embody the spirit of dandyism to redefine a long tradition of Black people dramatising their appearance to assert their dignity.

Figures like Edward Enninful, the first male and first Black editor-in-chief of British Vogue, and co-chair Pharrell Williams succeeding Virgil Abloh as Louis Vuitton's men's creative director, are just two of the many examples of increasing diversity in the fashion industry.



Pharrell Williams at the Louis Vuitton Men's Pre-Fall 2024 Fashion Show in Hong Kong, his second collection as the luxury brand's men's creative director. (Louise Delmotte/The Associated Press)

Appropriation amidst a melting pot of culture

Gooden notes that it's not surprising for there to be different interpretations and appreciation of Black dandyism when Black culture is so influential and pervasive nowadays.

However, she cautions that there's a thin line between appreciating and celebrating Black style and appropriating it without giving back to the source.

"Are we just going to party on and enjoy the surface, the gloss of it?" she asked.

"Because it is going to reveal something."

Navarro Delgado says contemporary audiences are very aware of cultural appropriation, so he'll be watching with interest come Monday night to see how stylists will interpret the theme for non-Black celebrities.

"That, personally, I think is a minefield," he said.

The right theme for the times

Gooden says the theme is both a reflection of the current landscape and a statement that amplifies Black voices.

"'We want to give you your flowers,' I suppose, is another way of saying it," she said

Navarro Delgado calls the current climate and rhetoric of going back to a "better and greater America" a "dog whistle" to a time when African Americans were segregated and people of colour in general were oppressed.

But by highlighting Black dandyism and its influence beyond contemporary fashion, he says this year's Met Gala is a "reclamation of understanding" that the African diaspora is "critical to the culture of North America."

Black dandyism is extremely relevant during what he calls a "critical point in the history of the U.S., and in the history of race politics around the world."

Whatever happens at this year's Met Gala, he notes, will echo far beyond the walls of America's largest art museum.

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